THE

PROTESTANT FAITH

OR

SALVATION BY BELIEF

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PROTESTANT FAITH

OR

SALVATION BY BELIEF

BY

DWIGHT HINCKLEY OLMSTEAD

THIRD EDITION, WITH AN INTRODUCTION ON

THE LIMITATIONS OF THOUGHT

Salvation
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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE following essay, in substantially its present form, was read by the author before the Young Men's Christian Union of New York in 1856, and afterwards on two other occasions in 1860.

In 1874 it was printed, and some copies were distributed gratuitously, but none were placed upon the market for sale.

The author believes that its publication at this time will be of service to those disquieted by modern doubts, and he presents the essay to the consideration of Catholic and Protestant alike.

He is aware that the discourse does not affect, except incidentally, the fundamental question of the certainty and consequent reliability of beliefs and opinions. For, to what extent the latter are voluntary or invol-

2412

untary is one thing, but how far they can be depended upon and are therefore of value is quite another.

He will be prepared to suggest a hypothesis upon that subject, after the arguments of this present essay shall have been disposed of.

D. H. O.

NEW YORK, *April*, 1885.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

Introduction to the Third Edition, on The Limitations of Thought v

Preface to the Second Edition 5

I. The Protestant Reformation how occasioned .. 7

II. The Intellectual Character of the Reformation. 11

III. Free Inquiry against Authority 12

IV. Justification by Faith 16

V. What Luther and the Reformers meant by Faith 19

VI. The Relation between Moral Obligation and Moral Consequences 22

VII. The nature of Beliefs and Opinions 30

VIII. Concluding remarks 45

APPENDIX.

Note 1 69

Note 2 69

Note 3 73

Note 4 73

Note 5 73

Note 6 74

Commendatory Criticisms 75

INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EDITION.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THOUGHT.

UNTIL the questions, how far beliefs are binding on the individual holding them, and to what extent they are conclusive and certain in themselves, are settled, the Protestant Reformation begun by Luther will not have reached its logical end. For it will be found to be free thought itself which has supplied the answer to those questions, and has declared the correct limitations of thought.

Whatever is involuntary is also compulsory. Therefore, had Luther, at the Diet of Worms, instead of declaring as he did, that he "*would* not go back a single inch," proceeded a step further and said he "*could* not," he would have announced the ultimate and vital principle of Protestantism, and averted three centuries of

religious contention.* The obligatory character of beliefs upon the individual holding them is the point he failed to apprehend and state. It does not follow, however, that such beliefs and mental determinations, although conclusive on the individual, are necessarily true in themselves, since the conscious limitations of the human mind do not permit its assertion of the true and absolute. While this has been claimed to be disproved by the Cartesian formula "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I exist), it is obvious that the formula goes no further than if it said *Cogito, ergo Ego* (I think, therefore I)—that is, A equals A. Thought and being are not identical.

Thought presupposes an authoritative sanction for which the Ego stands, but not necessarily a personal being. Without such sanction, reason, understanding, and memory could have no support or recognition, and the human mind would be like a ship on the boundless ocean without compass or rudder. Nor can the existence of an infinite being be more certainly

* See pp. 14, 15, *infra*.

affirmed than that of a finite being. The ideas are correlated. Doubtless there appears to be an irresistible force and will endowed with intelligence which permeates and moves the universe, but there has never been any decisive proof that behind that seeming force is an actual distinctive personality.

It is, therefore, according to the apprehension of each individual that the outward world, or what is objective, even what are called "necessary truths," for him may be said to exist. The Ego pretends to declare neither the real nor the unreal. It stands for a supreme subjective authority, whose adjudications, while impossible to be denied, cannot be absolutely affirmed.

We thus take our departure from the positive philosophy of Cousin and Hamilton, and come to what may be termed the *Philosophy of the Undeniable.*

This—the binding and conclusive nature of opinions, for the time being, upon the person holding them and the uncertainty of their tenure—is the final solution of the theory of in-

voluntary belief. Upon the acceptance of this theory must stand philosophy, science, and even biblical criticism. What cannot be controverted is not necessarily nor even presumptively true ; because the contention, if any, is subject to the same limitations as the assertion.

It is the province of science to discover and demonstrate universal truths, so called, namely, those which are undeniable to the common reason and universally accepted, like the phenomena of time, space, and number, whether real verities or not, and it is upon such demonstration that the whole scientific fabric rests.

What appeals to his understanding the scientist believes regardless of the statements of the Bible to the contrary ; and what the biblical critic does not believe, he also justifies by the consciously binding nature of his judgments. Each of them knows that for himself there is no other criterion of truth than himself. He is the ultimate judge.

It has been the good fortune of the scientist largely to escape the necessity of argument

which the maintenance of abstract theological opinions requires. He has recognized from the outset the principle of compulsory belief for which we contend. As remarked by Helmholtz in his *Theory of Vision:* "All we can do by voluntary and conscious effort in order to come to a conclusion is, after all, only to supply complete materials for constructing the necessary premises. As soon as this is done, the conclusion forces itself upon us. These conclusions, which (it is supposed) may be accepted or avoided as we please, are not worth much."

But, on the contrary, the biblical critic, while recognizing the compulsory and binding nature of his own opinions so far as he himself is concerned, refuses to recognize the principle as applicable to others, and thus justifies the contention of the Roman Catholic that Protestantism is destructive of the idea of a church universal,—in other words, of any church,—which, however, is a logical conclusion applicable to the Roman Catholic Church as well.

The following essay was projected in the

mind of the author half a century ago. The first edition of the essay was issued in 1874. The author believes the modern tendency of scientific and religious thought justifies its republication, and that many of its propositions which were generally rejected at the time it was written, will now be generally conceded.

Some of the criticisms which appeared subsequent to the first publication are appended to the present edition.

D. H. O.

New York, *October*, 1897.

AN ESSAY

ON THE

PROTESTANT FAITH.

I.

The Protestant Reformation how occasioned.

The sixteenth century ushered in a period of great intellectual activity. The revival of literature, art and science; the brilliant maritime discoveries; the prevailing spirit of controversy and enterprise; but more especially the introduction of printing, whereby knowledge was disseminated, and made common to more than one nation or generation, had all given a new and remarkable impulse to human thought, distinguishing that as the most important epoch in modern history. As men

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began to think for themselves, their first protestation, as may well be supposed, was against the restraint of thought and its authoritative dictation. The fears of the Vicar of Croydon were well nigh realized: "We "must root out printing, or printing will root "out us."

It must not be forgotten that for centuries the Roman Church had been the prominent, controlling power of Christendom. She did not spring up in a day, but was "the fruit of "a long array of most learned men, distin- "guished colleges and councils, sanctioned by "noble martyrs and numerous miracles."

So much was she, for these reasons, lifted above the common crowd, it is not surprising if to them her utterances had early the force of law, and that she, in turn, should count herself infallible.

But not content with being the spiritual head, she aspired to temporal dominion. She demanded tribute from all nations, and arrayed armed legions for her own use; she made and unmade kings; she became the

umpire of trade; she dictated laws and treaties. At all Christian courts her legates took precedence, soon assuming to represent that divine right — that supreme authority — by whose sanction alone princes were then, as now, supposed to govern.

To this supremacy she set up the claim of prescription. Had she not for a thousand years stood firm on that rock whereon Christ himself had set her, amid changing empires, the rude assaults of barbarism, and the decisions of hostile councils? Had not her edicts become the recognized theology of the greater part of the civilized world? How could she be in error who could point to a history like this?

At length her prestige began to decline; and while that result was in no small degree due to the corruptions of the priesthood, its main cause is to be found in that growing mental enfranchisement ever since peculiarly characteristic of the Protestant nations, imparting to them a superior energy and intelligence, derived, as has been most truly said,

"not from the creeds they hold, but from the "private liberty which accompanies these "creeds." *

Never before had the traditional pretensions and policy of the Church been so seriously and persistently questioned, nor ever before had so large a proportion of the Christian world presumed to assert anything contrary to her canons. But now the boldness of a few learned men at first, and afterwards of the people at large, began to shake her authority.

It was not that men had the right to think, but the undeniable, patent fact, that they did think, and could not help thinking and having intelligent opinions of their own, which gave point to the struggle.

Thus arose that great conflict between Authority, so called, and Opinion—between the authority of the Pope and the opinions of the educated classes; between the authority of councils and the individual judgment. And it need scarcely be said that the contest, al-

* Westminster Review, Jan. 1858.

though in the most enlightened countries somewhat in favor of the individual, is not concluded even to this day.

II.

The Intellectual Character of the Reformation.

The Lutheran reformation, which had, in reality, been impending from the time of Wyckliffe, was an intellectual rather than a religious movement. From it nothing has been gained directly for religion; nothing, except what has resulted from independence of thought, free speech, and the present heterogeneous character of the Christian world —for even this last is progress.

It was not wholly a failure; since, whatever may have been the theological errors of Luther, (and grave errors they were), it cannot be denied that in the history of the present wide and fundamental variance between the hereditary assumptions of the Church and common sense, he was among the first who

opened the gate of free inquiry, disenthralled men from a blind, unreasonable subservience to priestly rule, and directed them to the partial liberty they have since enjoyed.

III.

Free Inquiry against Authority.

That this was the occasion and essential feature of the Reformation, an assertion of the right, or rather the recognition of the necessity of private judgment and interpretation, as opposed to the authority and dictation of the Church, it will not be difficult to show from the writings and disputations of Luther himself.

"Retract," said the Pope's legate to him at Augsburg. "Retract! acknowledge thy er-
"ror, whether thou believest it an error or not!
"The Pope commands thee to do this."*

"Convince me," replied Luther.

One of the conditions imposed upon Luther was "that he should not circulate any opin-

* Michelet, Life of Luther, p. 50.

"ions at variance with the authority of the "Church."

"Do you not know," said the cardinal to him, "that the Pope is above all councils?"

But "from the Pope ill informed," Luther appeals "to the Pope better informed."

He also afterwards declared, "In what con- "cerns the word of God and the faith, every "Christian is as good a judge for himself as "the Pope can be for him."*

This conflict between the authority of the Church and private opinion, between the assumption of infallibility and the protest against it, was nowhere more marked than at the Diet at Worms, whereof we have Luther's own account.

Said the Emperor's orator to him, "Martin, "you have assumed a tone which becomes not "a man of your condition. . . . . You "have resuscitated dogmas which have been "distinctly condemned by the Council of Con- "stance, and you demand to be convicted "thereupon out of the Scriptures. But if

* Michelet, Life of Luther, pp. 94, 95.

"every one were at liberty to bring back into "discussion points which for ages have been "settled by the Church and by Councils, "nothing would be certain and fixed—doc-"trine or dogma—and there would be no be-"lief which men must adhere to under pain "of eternal damnation. You, for instance, "who to-day reject the authority of the Coun-"cil of Constance, to-morrow may, in like "manner, proscribe all councils together, and "next, the Fathers and the Doctors; and "there would remain no authority whatever "but that individual word, which we call to "witness, and which you also invoke." *

But Luther "could only repeat what he "had already declared: that unless they "proved to him by irresistible arguments "that he was in the wrong, he would not go "back a single inch; that what the councils "had laid down was no article of faith; that "councils had often erred, had often contra-"dicted each other, and that their testimony "consequently was not convincing." †

* Michelet, Life of Luther, p. 90. † Ibid. p. 89.

Further, while resisting the authority of the Church, Luther, at the same time, claimed for his own opinions the weight of authority, binding not alone upon himself, but upon all the world beside.

When the Zwinglians inquired of him what would effect a reconciliation between them, he answered, "Let our adversaries believe as we do."

"We cannot," responded the Swiss.

"Well then," replied Luther, "I abandon "you to God's judgment."*

Robertson, in his history of Charles the Fifth, makes this deserved remark. "Luther, "Calvin, Cranmer, Knox, the founders of the "reformed church in their respective coun- "tries, inflicted so far as they had the power "and opportunity, the same punishments "which were demanded against their own "disciples by the Church of Rome, on such "as called in question any article of their "creeds."

* Merle d'Aubigné, Hist. Ref. Vol. IV. p. 99

"God" (said Knox) "raiseth them up to "slay those whom the Kirk hateth."*

IV.

Justification by Faith.

Let us now examine the peculiar but pernicious tenet of "justification by faith," which Luther advanced, and which is, to this day, the key-note of Protestant theology. That doctrine was thus declared by the regulations published by Joachim in 1539:

"That we obtain the remission of sins, jus-"tification, and final and eternal salvation by "the mere grace of God, and only through "faith in the redemption of Christ, and by no "worthiness, work, or desert of our own."

From time immemorial the Roman Catholic Church had held that the performance of duty lay in some act, rather than in a belief, although she seems never to have precisely determined the quality essential to salvation.

* Attributed to John Knox by James Grant, in his novel "Bothwell, or the Days of Mary Queen of Scots."

She imposed the condition of meritorious deeds, and buried her devotees in the cloister with fasting and penance, or sent them forth to administer to human needs, or perchance to perish in battle before the walls of infidel cities. Indeed, so much of real heroism and warlike renown was associated and entwined with this theology of works, that for her to give it up was to surrender and make secular the splendid history of centuries.

Luther, disgusted with the traffic in indulgences, the gross impositions and abandoned habits of the priesthood; unable to reconcile their practices with their professions, or the canons of the Church with either; and being, if not more spiritual, at least more honest or more bold than they, undertook to interpret the Bible for himself, according to his unquestionable right so to do. But in that interpretation he perpetuated these two most fatal errors: first, the assumed importance of endeavoring to save the soul, whether by faith or works; and second, that immunity from moral punishment is secured by some belief.

To these same errors, common to, and the essential features of most if not all prevailing religious systems, let us briefly direct our attention. I shall endeavor to show:

I. *That the avoidance of moral consequences being wholly utilitarian, can be no incentive to the performance of duty; and that an act performed with any reference to a personal benefit, is just to that extent without merit.*

II. *That belief is not subject to the will, but is involuntary, and is therefore not blameworthy.*

The importance and bearing of the investigation is obvious. For, if a personal wish and effort for salvation be not an act of duty, under a strict definition of that term, and an involuntary belief be not able of itself to effect that salvation, then it follows as a matter of course, that the inquiry common to most Christians as well as heathen, "What shall we "do to be saved?" as also their answers, that salvation comes by "belief," can find no place in a correct system of moral science.

V.

What Luther and the Reformers meant by "Faith."

Before proceeding directly to the consideration of these topics, it is proper to observe that Luther and the reformers meant by the word "faith," ("The just shall live by faith"),* not a trust, a hope, a confidence, a reliance, an assurance, a sentiment, or the like, as suggested by some persons who have anticipated the arguments I shall urge, but simple intellectual belief or mental assent, in its plainest acceptation. As this may be deemed a matter of consequence, let us at the outset dispose of it.

The historian, Merle d'Aubigné, informs us that Luther, Melanchthon, Agricola, Brientz, Justus Jonas, and Osiander, "being convinced "that their peculiar doctrine on the Eucharist "was essential to salvation, they considered

* Galatians, iii. 11.

"all those who rejected it, as without the pale "of the faith."

"But that *faith* (which makes us Chris- "tians)," declares Luther, "consists in the "*firm belief* that Jesus is the Son of God."

He also says, "A man's sins are not par- "doned unless he *believes* that they are par- "doned when the priest pronounces absolu- "tion." And again, "I have affirmed," says Luther, "that no man can be justified before "God except by *faith;* so that it is necessary "that a man should *believe* with perfect confi- "dence that he has received pardon. To "doubt of this grace is to reject it."*

Merle d'Aubigné tells us that "Luther ex- "pressed astonishment that the Swiss divines "could look upon him as a Christian brother "when they did not *believe* his doctrines to be "true."†

Zwingle also says: "In every nation who- "soever *believes* with all his heart in the Lord "Jesus, is accepted of God. Here truly is

* See also Merle d'Aubigné, Hist. Ref. Vol. II. p. 111.
† See Appendix. Note 1.

"the Church, out of which no one can be "saved."

The 44th and last article of the Athanasian creed, as found in modern English Prayer Books, and which is to-day made a test of church membership, is in these words: "This "is the *Catholic Faith*, which, except a man "*believe faithfully*, he cannot be saved."

Take away the creeds from the churches, and what remains to distinguish them either as religious organizations or from each other? The "essential" creeds are certainly the bond of the "evangelical" churches. Indeed, the difference between the most conservative and progressive sects of the present day—between Episcopalians, Universalists, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, and all other denominations—is marked solely and entirely by differences of opinion. That is what really keeps them apart, and not any principle, nor their forms of worship. So, however faith in the abstract may be defined, it is a matter of little moment, since the actual fact appears to be, that diversities of opinion,

or simple intellectual beliefs, and not sentimentalities, or emotions, or purposes divide religious bodies.

If the word "faith" had come to have a different signification from what it possessed at the time of the Reformation (which it has not), it would only prove that Luther and Calvin were not the fathers of modern theology.

It might be shown, if necessary, that nothing can be further from our volition than an engendered trust, or confidence, or even feeling, or any of those mental states proposed to be substituted for plain belief. But such a discussion would be foreign to the present purpose.

VI.

The Relation between Moral Obligation and Moral Consequences.

Having thus shown that the Protestant "faith" means practically the Protestant "belief," both as understood by the reform-

ers, and by modern acceptation, I proceed to discuss the first topic, namely: *the unfitness of an appeal to the sentiment of fear in producing religious emotion.*

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" is the caption of an article in the "Family "Christian Almanac," published by the American Tract Society. Here follows the answer. "What must I do? By the grace of God, "and according to His truth, I will tell you. "You must admit and feel that you are a sin- "ner, guilty, polluted, condemned, lost, and "so dead in sins as to be in need of eternal "life." . . . "You must believe that He "is the Saviour, the only Saviour, able to "save to the uttermost; willing to save all "that will come to Him; ready and willing "to save you, and to save you now;" and much more to the same effect.

Whatever may be the views and refinements of the more educated members of the "orthodox" churches, it is fair to presume that the foregoing quotation fairly expresses the sum total of the formal religion of the

majority of them; that with them the object of religion is to save the soul, and to save it by a certain prescribed belief.

A prominent Presbyterian clergyman of Brooklyn, in a published discourse, remarks: "Here is the fatal barrier that lies between "their souls and Heaven—unbelief." . . . "Unbelief excludes a sinner from the rest of "Heaven. It is man's crowning sin." . . . "The fatal chasm that separates the soul from "its rest, has been not an immoral life, not a "severe and angry God, not a violated law, "but unbelief—simple unbelief—a heartless, wilful, determined unbelief."*

The conclusions hereafter arrived at, as to the involuntary character of beliefs and opinions sufficiently refute such theology; but there are other objections to it.

Taking the term "salvation" in the strictly orthodox and popular sense, namely, as the remission of a deserved penalty, as an immunity, temporal or eternal, from bodily or spir-

* "The Promise Unrealized," by Rev. J. E. Rockwell, D.D. Published Sept. 1859.

itual suffering, what, it may be asked—judged by a moral standard—is the relation between the salvation of the human family hereafter, and their right conduct here? The ideas of right, wrong, duty, moral obligation, have no necessary connection with the notion of rewards and punishments. The sentiment of duty is wholly removed from that of recompense. "Duty is not measured by reward."* The end of man's moral nature is virtue, not happiness. The punishment of self-disapproval—of conscience—is undoubtedly consequent on wrong doing, either in its earlier or later stages; but it would be equally wrong doing, whether followed by punishment or not. As virtue is, in the abstract, independent of its rewards, so is sin of its penalties.

Looking at it in the "orthodox" view, (which is not admitted to be the correct one), namely, that under the doctrine of free grace the accountability occasioned by sin is but a mere liability to account, the punishment is not certain, even though the law be broken.

* Cousin, Hist. Mod. Phil. Vol. II. p. 285.

What if we err about the fact of our punishment, will that change either the fact itself, or the obligations imposed upon us?

Even were our beliefs voluntary, could it, in a moral aspect, be of any possible avail to us to know the conditions of either our present or future existence? for we live subject to a moral law, whether aware of it or not.

"It seems enough for us," as Benjamin Franklin said, "that the soul will be treated "with justice in another life respecting its "conduct in this."

Whether mankind are to meet their deserts here or hereafter, or what may be their just deserts, is one thing; but it is quite another how far the performance of one's duty is to be affected by a solution of the question.

We are enjoined by orthodox theology to attend to the salvation of our souls. But why should we? The sense of duty is an authoritative consciousness, imperatively imposed, a voice as of God within us, carrying its own sanction, and must be obeyed, like any other law, for its own sake, because to each of us it

evidently and undeniably commands what is right.

Self-approval and disapproval—which are the monitions of conscience—moral sentinels, so to speak, having the same relation to the spiritual well-being as pain has to the bodily —simply point to the rule of right, and are its accidents, but do not afford the reason of it. An action may seem to tend to desirable results, yet there can be no personal virtue in its performance unless it is performed from a sense of duty alone; and, whoever acts for the sake of recompense, (as he must who makes the recompense a motive), is just to that extent not virtuous; because the very idea of a virtuous act, as recognized in the mind, is that it is something to be performed wholly regardless of consequences.

Virtue is disinterested, is superior to self and disregards it. If it does not disregard expediency as an end, then it is not virtue. Nay, it contains the idea of sacrifice.

Again, as before remarked, a just law vindicates itself—bears its own sanction—and the

obligation to obey it does not proceed from the personal consequences of its infraction, however lamentable they may be, but from its evident justness and fitness. "Right is "not right because God wills it to be right, "but from its own reasonableness;" otherwise God would be a tyrant. I ought to do a certain thing, or follow a certain course of action, because it seems to me that I ought; because *I*, (*Ego*, myself) *being the sole ultimate authority*, believe it to be right. Can argument add any strength to that affirmation? Would not the denial of it be to deny what at the same time I myself affirmed? Conscience therefore is not so much an instinct, as a declaration of the person himself in respect to those things which ought to be done or to be left undone; and that affirmation being undeniable by the individual himself, is on that account conclusive on him.

The theology which looks to the mere salvation of the soul, whether from punishment or from sin itself, can be defended neither on principle, nor—paradoxical as it may seem—

on the plea of expediency; certainly not, if he be the happiest who is the most virtuous.

Take a practical illustration: Is a child really better, or more virtuous, because he has refrained from doing an interdicted thing for fear of the punishment which awaited him? and would he grow up under such a course of training a better man? Assuredly not; for his whole aim then, would be simply and entirely to enjoy as much, and suffer as little, as possible. He might, through this continual fear of punishment, form an exterior habit of right conduct, of outward morality, which would pass him reputably through life. But would he be inwardly and really a better man? Assuredly not; and it needs only an adequate temptation to break that habit, and disprove the false philosophy in which he had been reared. We see it every day. But let the child be sound at the core, at the heart, without regard to what is external—to the husks of a base expediency; let him be taught to follow, unfettered by theological systems, the dictates of his conscience, and obey the

divine mandate within him, and then what end shall there be to his noble aspirations! He will be prepared to enter—aye, will actually have already entered on immortal life.

Alas, that so many pure natures should have struggled and sorrowed under so much ignorance and superstition in endeavoring to reconcile their own inward promptings with the so-called inspired, but really most unreasonable faith, said to have been "once deliv-"ered to the saints!"

VII.

The Nature of Beliefs and Opinions.

I now pass to the consideration of the second main proposition, viz.: that *all belief is involuntary*, and is that which, of our own will, we can neither choose, change, nor control. It is therefore not blameworthy.

This position is not new, having received the sanction of some of the best minds in every age.

Concerning the followers of the once fa-

mous Duns Scotus, Sir James Mackintosh says: "The Scotists affirmed the blameless-"ness of erroneous opinions; a principle "which is the only effectual security for con-"scientious enquiry, for mutual kindness and "for public quiet." *

Mackintosh also declares: "It is as absurd "to entertain an abhorrence of intellectual "inferiority or error, however extensive or "mischievous, as it would be to cherish a "warm indignation against earthquakes or "hurricanes."†

Other writers are equally to the point. A very old one says: "We know that faith "comes by persuasion, and is not to be con-"trouled."‡

Another, still older, and of high authority in the Church, says: "Religion by compul-"sion is no longer religion; it must be by "persuasion, and not by constraint. Religion "is under no control, and cannot by power "be directed." §

* Eth. Phil. Vol. I. p. 46. † Ibid. p. 150.

‡ Fléchier, Bishop of Nismes, Lett. 10.

§ Lactantius, B. 3.

Citations from more modern philosophers and thinkers might be added without number. A few will suffice: "Our will hath no power "to determine the knowledge of the mind "one way or the other. No more than in "objects of sight it depends on the will to see "that black which appears to be yellow, or in "feeling to persuade ourselves that what "scalds us feels cold." *

"It does not depend on man to believe or "not to believe." †

"It is not in our power to judge as we "will." ‡

"In total and absolute error all conscious- "ness perishes." §

"Thought and belief have not yet become "choice." ‖

"Our opinions on any subject are not vol- "untary acts but involuntary effects." ¶

* Locke, "Essay on the Human Understanding," Vol. II. Chap. 13.

† Locke, Letter on Toleration.

‡ Reid, Essay on the Intellectual Powers, p. 545.

§ Cousin, Hist. Mod. Phil. p. 136.

‖ Hickok, Moral Phil. p. 212.

¶ Samuel Bailey, Essays on Opinions and Truth.

"Belief is not an act of volition." *

"He [man] is impelled by the very consti-
"tution of his nature, to believe if there is ev-
"idence; and, on the other hand, he is utterly
"unable to believe if evidence is wanting." †

"Philosophical belief is a spontaneous as-
"sent or adhesion of the mind." ‡

"Be not deceived; belief of, or mere assent
"to the truth of propositions upon evidence
"is not a virtue, nor unbelief a vice; faith is
"not a voluntary act, it does not depend upon
"the will; every man must believe or disbe-
"lieve, whether he will or not, according as
"evidence appears to him. If therefore men
"however dignified or distinguished command
"us to believe, they are guilty of the highest
"folly and absurdity, because it is out of our
"power; but if they command us to believe,
"and annex rewards to belief, and severe pen-
"alties to unbelief, then they are most wicked
"and immoral, because they annex rewards

* Percy Bysshe Shelley.

† Upham, Treatise on the Will, p. 92.

‡ Sir William Hamilton, Philosophy, p. 158.

"and punishments to what is involuntary, and "therefore neither rewardable or punisha- "ble." *

These conclusions appear to be fully warranted for the following reasons:

First: If belief be voluntary, why should there be any doubt, or uncertainty, or degrees of probability in the world? It is plain that were belief consequent upon the will, there need be no such thing as doubt; for then one would only *will* to have any belief in order to possess it.

Let one reflect whether he can change or choose his belief at pleasure; he will find he cannot, and that it is beyond his power, even with a dishonest or evil purpose, to believe for the time otherwise than he does. It is true that he may and must, from time to time, change his belief as new evidence is presented to him, or as he more carefully considers that already before him; but for the time being he cannot, if he would, believe otherwise than he does.

* Letter of William Pitt.

Second: Belief is simply the result of thought; it is a mental state or condition. Its primary signification is to *assent to.** Hence it depends wholly upon evidence; and in the very same ratio as the evidence appeals to our consciousness for its reception, so is our belief. Thus we speak of "full," "firm," and "strong" belief—belief which we call knowledge—belief which admits of doubt—and various degrees of probability. We may repel the evidence, but over the belief consequent upon that evidence, are powerless.

Third: It will be seen, on reflection, that one cannot rationally retain a belief which his judgment repudiates. Therefore, one cannot rationally admit his present beliefs to be erroneous; for just as soon as he thinks that they are erroneous, they cease to be his beliefs; and since he cannot consciously err in his beliefs, his erroneous beliefs are involuntary.

From which it follows, that what in me is, for the time, error, does not receive that name from any judgment of mine, but from the

* Webster.

judgment of others; and whosoever avers that I err in opinion, assumes all the points in discussion between us; he substantially denies to me what he claims for himself, namely, authority to pass upon the question.

Whence it also appears that error is ignorance; an idea well expressed by Cousin: "In total and absolute error all consciousness "perishes."

Fourth: Belief is not volition nor anything like it; it has no more necessary connection with the will than the idea of number has with the idea of justice.

The expression, "I believe," is conventional, and is used in the same manner as we say I "feel," or "hear" or "see" or "am." That is, the *I*, the *Ego*, the *personality*, takes cognizance of some impression on the mind or sense, observes some phenomenon, or appearance, and passes upon it authoritatively. The will appertains to the personality, but not to the judgment; and while objects of thought, or phenomena, may, through the exercise of the will, or regardless of the will, be presented

to the judgment, the conclusion of the judgment itself, or, what is the same thing, the authoritative, conclusive, subjective assertion of the *Ego* in respect to such phenomena, is involuntary.

We can direct our attention and investigate; but the results of that investigation—our conclusions—will stand before us regardless of our wishes or intentions in the matter.

Abercrombie admits that "the state of mind "which constitutes belief is, indeed, one over "which the will has no direct power. But," he goes on to say, "belief depends upon evi- "dence; the result of even the best evidence "is entirely dependent on attention; and at- "tention is a voluntary intellectual state over "which we have a direct and absolute con- "trol." *

Dr. Chalmers states the case thus:

"Lord Byron's assertion that 'Man is not "responsible for his belief,' seems to have pro- "ceeded from the imagination that belief is in "no case voluntary. Now, it is very true that

* Moral Feelings, p. 182.

"we are only responsible for what is volun-
"tary, and it is also true that we cannot be-
"lieve without evidence. But then it is a
"very possible thing that a doctrine may pos-
"sess the most abundant evidence, and yet
"not be believed, just because we choose to
"shut our eyes against it; and our unbelief in
"this case is owing not to the want of evi-
"dence, but to the evidence not being at-
"tended to. Grant that belief is not a volun-
"tary act—it is quite enough for the refuta-
"tion of Lord Byron's principle, if *attention*
"be a voluntary act. One attends to a sub-
"ject because he chooses; or he does not at-
"tend to it because he so chooses. It is the
"fact of the attention being given or withheld,
"which forms the thing that is to be morally
"reckoned with. And if the attention has
"been withheld when it ought to have been
"given, for this we are the subjects of a right-
"ful condemnation."

I admit attention to be a voluntary act; but, while insisting, for reasons hereafter explained, that it is not one's duty even to inves-

tigate a subject unless he thinks it to be his duty to do so, it is evident that Dr. Chalmers has not met the question. He would instruct us that because a man has power over his will, he can therefore control his senses; because he can thrust his finger into the fire or withhold it, it is optional with him to be free from pain; because he has the ability to reason or not, that is, to direct his attention, he need not come to any conclusion; because he can think when he chooses, he can believe as he chooses. Of course a clear statement of the proposition carries its own refutation.

It is said that because belief depends upon attention to the evidence offered, and attention depends upon the will, I am therefore, in a secondary sense, accountable for the belief, because accountable for my voluntary disposition. Because not strictly correct, the statement is not correct at all. It is plain that while I can fix my attention, and look, I cannot tell beforehand whether the color will be white or black; and it is equally plain that while the attention is voluntary and controlled

by the will, the belief or conclusion following the attention, is not at all voluntary. And if the belief be not voluntary, then Byron's assertion that "Man is not responsible for his belief" is unquestionably correct; and it does not suffice for the refutation of that statement to show the act of attention to be voluntary.

For our voluntary dispositions, for the attention, as the legitimate act of the person, it is said that we are accountable. Be it so; but the argument can go no further than that.

While the will may, and does, direct the attention, it has no power over the belief, which results independently of the volition, and independently of the attention also. The utmost attention by different persons does not ensure the same belief, and precisely the same evidence is not always regarded by different persons alike; nor does it invariably lead in different minds to the same conclusion. Nay more, the very same evidence, presented at different times to the same mind does not

always lead to the same conclusion; but in neither case is the conclusion a matter of will.

Had Abercrombie and Chalmers reflected a moment, they must have seen the manifest difference between attention as an act of the will, and belief as the result of that attention; the one being voluntary, the other involuntary.

A man who shutting his eyes fires into the street and kills another, is not punished for killing the identical person who happens to be hit, but for the antecedent intention and purpose of his mind. True, he is not punished as for murder, if no one be injured, because human laws take cognizance of overt acts merely, of the intention only when it is accompanied by a result; but in a moral aspect, the purpose alone is considered, as appears from the circumstance that where the purpose is shown to be wanting, no crime can be imputed.

The voluntary disposition of the person determines the quality of his moral actions, occasions the sense of approval and disapproval,

and renders him deserving of praise or blame. This the child, as soon as he is able to reflect, the man, and everybody knows.

I therefore conclude that, strictly and hence correctly speaking, all belief—and, of course, all erroneous belief—is in itself wholly involuntary; and for that reason no one should be censured for his belief or disbelief upon any subject however sacred or profane, whether such belief be thought by others to be erroneous or not, or even pernicious.

This point, if well taken, it cannot be denied, strikes at the very existence of the churches, and is fatal to their present form of organization. For, were they to retain all persons of right intentions and pure dispositions, and reject all others—taking members for what they are, that is for their characters and motives rather than for their doctrines—or for what they say are their doctrines—would not the complexion of the churches be materially changed?

Right intentions do not, as has been seen, necessarily or often ensure the same beliefs.

How those intentions are to be arrived at, (since the creeds do not determine them,) whether by the assertion of the individual himself, (for he may tell an untruth,) or by the judgment of his fellow communicants, (for they may be deceived,) it is difficult to say. I leave the solution of this hard problem to the churches themselves.

The idea that men are accountable for their beliefs and opinions in a secondary, but strictly incorrect and most unphilosophical sense, rather than for conscientious action—making creed rather than character the criterion of morality—although it seems at first a trifling and unimportant distinction, has been and is now a gross theological and metaphysical error—the most gross and vital in its effects of any recorded by history; having needlessly excited the animosity of one class or sect against another—of the civilized against the barbarous—of the Jew against the Gentile—of the Protestant against the Catholic. It has occasioned terrible devastating wars; the annulling of private friendships and pub-

lic comities; and has inflicted incalculable evils upon the whole human race.

I am aware where I stand. I stand on a platform which holds sectarianism, in its exclusive form, to be both irreligious and unphilosophical, and all wars of sects unholy; which throws down the barriers between "evangelical" and "unevangelical" denominations, and renders meaningless those terms as now applied; and which summons all men — Christians and Pagans — from unseemly contentions to obedience to the high rule of tolerance and charity.

I think I have fully demonstrated the two propositions with which I set out; namely: that salvation is not a proper incentive to the performance of duty; and that belief is involuntary.

In no sense did this so-called scheme of redemption—salvation through faith or belief, ("the just shall live by faith,")—as understood by Luther and his followers, contain the solution of any religious question. It did not differ in kind from the theology of the Roman

Church. To Luther's assertion of the necessity of free thought, and the right of free speech, together with the revival of letters, must be attributed the great uprising of his age; and it is not too much to say that Protestants, in embracing and giving such prominence to religious tenets—especially the error of adopting creeds as a test of membership in their churches—have failed to comprehend their own history, and totally lost sight of the principle of personal authority and individual judgment, which is the foundation and root of every protestation they have ever uttered.

VIII.

Concluding Remarks.

It must not be supposed that because any particular beliefs are unessential to a religious life, or because beliefs and opinions are involuntary, they are thence unimportant. So far as the performance of one's own duty goes, belief is indeed of no consequence; because duty does not consist in believing. But doubtless

the happiness and well-being of mankind depend very much upon the opinions which they hold; since men will act more or less in accordance with their opinions and beliefs, whether well founded or not. For example, public sentiment respecting drunkenness, slavery, and very many questions affecting the social relations, has within a few years undergone a marked change; and thus have arisen in men's minds new ideas of their rights and duties as to those relations; and all honest men will act in accordance with their new beliefs.

The churches have always deemed themselves obliged to conform to the current notions of right and wrong, of virtue and vice, and have disciplined their members accordingly. A church member is now expelled for drunkenness when he would not have been a century ago.

The churches practically cannot live on their faith alone. The faith is not enough. The conduct according to the professed faith

is and must be a necessary test in addition to the formal creeds.

I am no iconoclast. I am willing that the churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples of all peoples and climes, should stand just where they are until better ones can be built upon their sites; I admit the fact of numberless religions in the world, and do not forget the multitude of Christian sects;* I recognize the sanction of martyrdom for every faith, right or wrong. I recognize alike the great moral points of agreement between Buddhism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity, and the minor theoretical divergences between them all. In a word, I recognize the voice of conscience, everywhere and among all men. And while mindful of these things, I insist that others shall not ignore them.

Let the sectarian, whoever he may be, place his own church or his own sect alongside these facts of history, and tell us, if he can, what is the religious element common to all

* See Appendix. Note 2.

religious organizations; what is the law of duty that applies to man universally.

That such a law or principle exists—a law which shall solve the riddle of the broad church—precisely define the terms "virtue" and "moral obligation"—assign to moralities their exact place in ethics, and at the same time satisfactorily account for the different religious phases of the world, is, and always has been, the great, central idea of theology. For without such a law there is no one religion for the race.

The lawgivers and religious instructors, of whatever creed or nation, proceed upon the assumption of one universal moral law. Upon it are founded our ideas of justice, of virtue, and the equal accountability of mankind.

"All nations have in truth only one religion," says Bucer.

"Such a rule" (says Hickok) "must be apprehended by the subject, and thus promulgated to the conscience, and must be so universal that it may come home in its convictions to the consciences of the race, other-

"wise there can be no valid ground for a com-
"prehensive science of morals."*

This law existed in the human mind anterior to the Christian revelation; nay, it must exist apart from any outward revelation.

Sir James Mackintosh remarks: "If there "were no foundation for morality antecedent "to revealed religion, we should want that "important test of the conformity of a revela-"tion to pure morality by which its claim to "a divine origin is to be tried."†

The law is within the individual as a primary, axiomatic, universal intuition. A law not always nor often perhaps, objectively apprehended; but this is immaterial, since the deductions and analogies of science continually remind us that we live under and are subject to innumerable laws of which we have no conception. Says Cicero: "The same eter-"nal immutable law comprehends all nations, "at all times, under one common Master and "Governor of all."

* Moral Philosophy, p. 32.
† Eth. Phil. p. 155.

What, then, is this rule—this religious law?

I know of no other than the simple law of nature that *conviction is the criterion of duty.*

St. Paul said: "To him that esteemeth any "thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean."*

And Christ: "If ye were blind ye should "have no sin; but now ye say, we see; there- "fore your sin remaineth."†

The followers of Zwingle said (rather inconsistently with their creed): "What is not "faith is sin. If therefore we constrain Chris- "tians to do what they deem unjust we force "them to sin."‡

Luther himself declared at the Diet of Worms: "It is neither just nor innocent to "act against a man's conscience."§

Rev. Henry Ward Beecher is reported to have said that, "Sound doctrine is truth, pur- "ity, love, good works; and bad living is "heresy in the New Testament. Nay," he

* Rom. xiv. 14.

† John ix. 41.

‡ Merle d'Aubigné, Hist. Ref. Vol. IV. p. 73.

§ John Scott, Luther and the Lutheran Reformation, Vol. I. p. 133.

adds, "I go further and say, that nowhere in "the New Testament can the term heresy be "found applied to any error of belief, but "only to error of life."

No nobler thought was ever uttered than that attributed to Abraham Lincoln: "To "do the right as God gives me to see the "right."

From the recognition of this common authoritative consciousness, which declares the performance of duty to consist in no seeking for a personal benefit, and in no belief, but simply in the effort to live conformably to one's beliefs, however for the time they happen to be; true to one's self, honestly and without hypocrisy, making Christianity, (or by whatever name it may be known,) as Coleridge has it, "not a theory, or a speculation, "but a life—not the philosophy of life, but a "life and a living process," will arise the New Church, (if a Church be possible,) the coming Reformation.

Has it not already begun?

I can only advert to it, but it would be easy

to demonstrate how the present various religious movements are vindicating my conclusions, not merely in an occasional manner, but in their whole tendency; how free thought, liberal sentiments, and the multiplying diversities of opinion consequent upon an increasing intelligence, are producing those mental and social conditions which will ere long render it impossible to hold any body of men together by what are called "essential "truths." Instead of vainly striving for a unity of belief, it will be seen that civilization advances in the precise ratio of the multiplication of beliefs.* The human intellect will then be truly free.

Bound to no assumed facts or asserted authoritative data, the lover of science will pursue his investigations without fear of discrediting the statements of the Bible; and the theologian will find something better to do

* In this respect I cannot agree with John Stuart Mill, who says, that "As mankind improve, the number of doc- "trines which are no longer disputed or doubted, will be "constantly on the increase." (*Essay on Liberty.*)

than wasting his time in childish disputes respecting the construction, interpretation, and truth of that book.

Such beliefs and opinions as do not affect the well-being of mankind will be deemed of little account, and efforts tending to elevate humanity will soon, in one form or another, take the place of liturgy and creed.

But I charge evangelical clergymen with inconsistency. Without committing myself to the "higher law" doctrine, as they understand it,* I desire to inquire whether the recognition of that doctrine by them, (and it is quite general,) detracts nothing from the force of the Thirty-Nine Articles? Are we to be told, and to believe because so told, that right and wrong are really relative ideas—that conviction of duty is the only guide to its performance, and, in the same breath, that there is some other guide? Shall we accept the higher law of moral obligation, and with it the lower rule of the Church? Shall we declare for free-will, for a conscious moral volition,

* See Appendix. Note 3.

and be bound down to a belief to which our understanding refuses its assent?

The intelligence of the masses has already risen to the level of these questions, and is demonstrating how a people will be provided with that religion, as well as political life, for which they are fitted.

The clergy, orthodox and heterodox, conceding something to the popular sentiment, have pretty much left off talking about the creed, except for church and state purposes, and tell us now that faith is not bare belief; but hope, trust, enthusiasm, sentiment; a matter of the heart, love of God, love of mankind; a living faith; a state of mind which, according to Aquinas, leads to belief—almost anything and everything except belief; that religion has passed historically from belief into feeling, and from feeling into action—into good works, charitable objects, and the like, wherein all can be agreed.

Do they really think so? Is there a Church which will accept, as its condition of membership, the definition which St. James gives of

ship, the definition which St. James gives of religion: "Pure religion and undefiled, before "God, even the Father, is this: To visit the "fatherless and the widows in their affliction, "and to keep oneself unspotted from the "world"?

Can you, O most moral, philanthropic, conscientious man, connect yourself with their body? Try it. Are you excluded by no want of faith, by no heretical doctrine? Their churches and Christian associations, founded in the eternal fitness of things, are not conventional bodies, with arbitrary rules, but claim to be holy catholic churches, and evangelical associations, with broad aisles and open doors. To the communion of those churches are invited every tongue and tribe upon the habitable globe, and vast expenditures for tracts and missionaries attest how sincere and urgent is the invitation. But the poor heathen scarcely approaches the door of the sanctuary before he discovers some stumbling-block in the shape of a "creed," which he is

enjoined to believe, but which he soon learns that Christians themselves do not fully understand, and about the meaning and interpretation of which few of them are agreed.

Is it to be wondered at that the heathen and uncultivated remain unconverted to propositions which even the most enlightened and cultivated fail to comprehend?*

The pagan is told that the Bible is an authority. But how, *as a bare authority*, is it preferable to the Vedas? For the authority is not in the Bible itself, nor in those who wrote it, but in him who reads it and passes upon it. As an authority *per se*, admitting of no question or comment, (and if authoritative it cannot be questioned,) it can have no greater force than any other book.

I concede to the Bible all the weight to which it is entitled in the light of my own judgment. No other test is possible by me than that.

Religion in its noblest, broadest acceptation, recognizes no ultimate authority foreign

* See Appendix. Note 4.

to the person himself. It defines no peculiar belief or creed which is orthodox to-day and heterodox to-morrow. The aspirations of the Christian Church toward its highest ideals, regardless of creeds, account sufficiently for its past successes. It has an aspect apart from its speculative theology.

With increasing intelligence and a higher moral culture, comes a juster sense of mutual relations and responsibilities; and the conformity of men to those ideas in any age, measures in history the Christianity as well as civilization of that period.*

Certain Churches have attempted to evade the question of the essential character of beliefs by putting articles of faith to vote, and then promulgating them as a mere statement of the belief of the members, as their "aver-" age sentiment," without imposing them upon the individual conscience. But it must be perfectly evident that so soon as a Church relinquishes the essential character of its creeds, and simply holds itself out as a body of men

* See Appendix. Note 5.

professing a common faith, it has lost its claim to be called a Church, in any received acceptation of the term, and admits itself to be without ecclesiastical authority.

The religious spirit of our age, advancing in the direction we have been pursuing, seeks something better than the restoration of a belief—even of one universal belief—or of a spiritual unity. It demands the statement of a rational principle which logically deduces morality from the sense of moral obligation; to faith adds works; justifies all truly good men, of whatever creed or race, who have ever lived; and, throwing open the door for investigation, finds use for the material already acquired in the march of general improvement. Especially does it aim to abate the rancor of sectarianism, by uniting in closer bonds the human family. To this end the material and commercial interests of the world are rapidly converging. To this end science is also tending.

And if it can be affirmed that the performance of duty consists neither in believing nor

in disbelieving; but in being true to one's self, in a continual advancement toward the highest ideal, whether that ideal be reason, sentiment, revelation, inspiration, the inner light, or in whatever else it consists, or whatever else it be called—so that it meets with a personal approval—then there is *eliminated from theology that which occasions sects.* And in emerging from them, we embrace at once in our communion the whole human brotherhood.

"An eloquent preacher, Richard Mott, in a "discourse of much unction and pathos, is "said to have exclaimed aloud to his congre- "gation, that he did not believe there was a "Quaker, Presbyterian, Methodist, or Baptist, "in Heaven. Having paused to give his "audience time to stare and to wonder, he "said, that in Heaven, God knew no distinc- "tion, but considered all good men as his "children, and as brethren of the same fam- "ily."*

The same question which caused the Lu-

* Letter of Thomas Jefferson.

theran Reformation still remains to be settled: Shall authority, falsely so named, external to the person, and predicated on an assumption, triumph, or shall the person himself triumph over that authority? Luther scouted papal authority, but he set himself up in its place and stead as an authority from which there should be no appeal. And wherever today in the Christian Church we have not papal Rome, we have Luther, or Calvin, or somebody else.

The "essential truths"—those so-called truths and formulas constituting the essence of the Protestant Church, bereft of which it would cease to exist—are without doubt the same in kind as those constituting the essence of the Roman Catholic Church, whether regarded as authority superior to reason and ignoring it, or as theories essentially unreasonable in themselves.

However much Luther may have scouted the argument of the papal legate, from their common stand-point, it was conclusively against him. "If every one were at liberty

"to bring back into discussion points which "for ages have been settled by the church "and by councils, nothing would be certain "and fixed, doctrine or dogma, and there "would be no belief which men must adhere "to under pain of eternal damnation."

Dr. Dix, the Rector of Trinity Church, New York, in a recent discourse* admitted, with great precision and frankness, that between external authority and private judgment, there was no middle ground; and upon the rock of authority he planted his church. There let it rest. If this age of free thought and general intelligence prefers tradition to reason in matters of religion when the issue is squarely made, we must perforce be content.

There is more to be feared from the influence of those representative liberal men who starting from right premises, and admitting the necessity of private judgment, still find some excuse for erroneous conclusions; who, while acknowledging the fact that the Church

* Delivered in the Broadway Tabernacle.

Universal lies beyond the narrow bounds of sectarianism, still cling to old ideas as fixed and unalterable; as "points which for ages "have been settled;" and insist on their reception, not because they are reasonable, but because they seem necessary (as they undoubtedly are) to the maintenance of an established, visible Church, because the Church cannot exist without them. And, on the other hand, thinking the Church to be a divine authoritative institution, having grown up with the notion that to assail it, however lightly, is nothing less than sacrilege, there comes upon them a mistrust that reason can afford no solution to the questions which agitate the religious world.

A distinguished Unitarian clergyman, in a sermon which created at the time of its publication a profound sensation says, "There are "truths in regard to politics, society, religion, "history, Christianity, manners, science, art, "which are no longer properly in debate. "True they are debated, as Hazlitt debated "the Newtonian astronomy; as Godwin de-

"bated the existence of society; as Buckle "debates the influence of religion on civiliza- "tion; but they are debated only by eccen- "tric, abnormal, or presumptuous minds— "minds out of pitch in the great concert of "the race." He calls it a "perilous folly" to allow polity, morals, religion, to be wholly open questions.*

But can the reverend gentleman inform us precisely what truths are really fixed? what questions are not open? He says there are certain ones not even to be discussed. He sets up "truths" for us to take as authoritative.† This is the old question, and the real issue. The general assertion, and assumption without proof, that there are "truths no "longer in debate" will not satisfy this generation. Do the ever-varying discoveries in science and psychology, or the indefinitely multiplying ideas and diversities of opinion which distinguish civilized and thinking from

* Sequel to "The Suspense of Faith," by Rev. Dr. Bellows, Sept. 25, 1859.

† See Appendix. Note 6.

barbarous nations, confirm it? Have our Orthodox Churches in their Union Meetings and Evangelical Alliances, yet found a common ground of union? Is the present political, religious, and moral condition of our own favored land, where the people are taught to read and reflect, such that we can infer stability from intellectuality, or hope for any nearer approach to universal agreement? Why, this is just the inevitable conflict of the age; not of the new against the old, but of investigation against assumption; of doubts against established systems; of opinion against usurped authority; of inquiry against dogmatism and superstition. On the one hand are arrayed traditions, mysteries, proscription, slavery; on the other, intelligence, humanity, liberty. To the former belong the cramped and crowded intellect, temporal power and oppression, the divine right of kings; to the latter, freedom, individuality, and mental enfranchisement.

Again, religion must, so far as it is to be

reasonable, necessarily rest on the conclusions of reason.

Cousin rightly declares that whatever is purely sentimental or emotional; which, expunging reason, leaves nothing in its place but "ecstacy" or "abstraction"—which promises me a superhuman science on the condition of my first losing consciousness, thought, liberty, memory, all that constitutes me an intelligent and moral being—is without the pale of speculation, and unreasonable; for it uses reason to deny reason.

On the contrary, the reason, so far as it is the expression of man's self-consciousness, is and must be supreme, and its deductions are unanswerable, and without appeal.

The universal conscience is likewise incontrovertible, being nearest in us to what is divine.

> "The Word proclaimed by the concordant voice
> Of mankind fails not; for in man speaks God." *

I appeal to the natural law, which, fixed

* Hesiod, Work and Days.

and eternal, guides alike the planets, in their immense courses, and human wanderings however erratic, in a predetermined orbit.

"Oh, backward looking son of time,
The new is old, the old is new;
The cycle of a change sublime
Still sweeping through.

* * * * *

"Take heart! the waster builds again;
A charmed life old goodness hath;
The tares may perish; but the grain
Is not for death."*

* John G. Whittier.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

NOTE 1. PAGE 20.

"Let the Christian reader's first object always be to "find out the literal meaning of the Word of God; for on "this and this alone is the whole foundation of faith and "Christian theology."—LUTHER, *Exposition of the Book of Deuteronomy.*

NOTE 2. PAGE 47.

"It is a lamentable fact that throughout the whole "world there is no system of religion, the votaries of "which are subdivided into so many sectaries as those "who profess an adherence to the Christian faith."—THOMAS DICK, *Influence of Knowledge on Morals, p.* 115.

The following is a recent enumeration of some of the different religious sects in Great Britain and the United States: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Associate Presbyterians, Agapæmonians, Anglo-Catholics, Albrights, Apostolics, Arminians, Advent Christians, Anglican Church (High Church, Low Church and Broad Church), Apostolics, Baptized Believers, Bereans, Believers in Christ, Bible Christians, Bible Defence Association, Brethren, Believers in Divine Visitation of Joanna Southcott, Benevolent Methodists, Blue Ribbon Army, Campbellites, Church of God, Church

of England and Wales, Christian Connection Methodists, Calvinistic Methodists (Whitefield's Connection), Countess of Huntingdon's Connection, Calvinists, Calvinistic Baptists, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Church of Scotland, Church of Scotland in England, Cameronians, Covenanters, Congregationalists, Catholic and Apostolic Church, Christians who object to be otherwise designated, Christian Believers, Christian Brethren, Christian Eliasites, Christian Israelites, Christian Teetotallers, Christian Temperance Men, Christian Unionists, Church of Christ, Christians owning no name but the Lord Jesus, Christian Mission, Christadelphians, Church of the People, Coventry Mission Band, Christian Disciples, Church of Progress, Catholic Christian Church, Disciples, Dutch Reformed Church, Dissenters, Derbyites, Disciples in Christ, Danish Lutherans, English Seventh-Day Baptists, Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church, Eastern Orthodox Greek Church, Eclectics, Episcopalians, Evangelical Free Church, Evangelical Mission, Episcopal Free Church, Free Gospel Church, Free-Will Baptists, Free Christian Baptists, Free Church (Episcopal), Free Church of England, Free Union Church, Free Church of Scotland, Free Congregations, Free Thinkers, Free Religionists, Friends or Quakers, Followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, Free Grace Gospel Christians, Free Christians, Free Christian Association, Free Evangelical Christians, Free Grace Gospel Church, Free Gospel and Christian Brethren, Free Gospellers, Free Methodists, Free Church, General Baptists, General Baptist New Connection, German Evangelical Union of the West, German Reformed Church, German Lutherans, Glassites, German Roman Catholics, Greek Catholic Church, Glory Band, Harmonists, Hicksite Friends, Hooker Mennonites, Hallelujah Band, Halifax

Psychological Society, Hope Mission, Humanitarians, Independents, Irvingites, Independent Religious Reformers, Independent Unionists, Inghamites, Independent Methodists, Israelites, Jews, Jumpers, Lutherans, Latter-Day Saints or Mormons, Mennonites, Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church South, Methodist Protestants, Modern Methodists, Morrisonians or Evangelical Unionists, Millerites or Second Adventists, Methodist Reform Union, Moravians, New Society Baptists, New Jerusalem or Christian Church, New Castle Sailors Society, New Church Society, New Wesleyans, Old Baptists, Original Connection of Wesleyans, Original United Seceders, Orthodox, Oneida Community or Perfectionists, Oratorians, Old Catholic, Open Baptists, Order of St. Austin, Orthodox Eastern Church, Peculiar People, Plymouth Brethren, Pedo-Baptists, Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, Primitive Methodists, Presbyterians, Presbyterian Church in the United States, (Old and New School), Presbyterian Church in the United States South, Puseyites, Positivists, Practical Christian Republic, Progressive Friends, Progressionists, Protestants adhering to the Articles of the Church of England, I. to XVIII. inclusive, but rejecting order and ritual, Providence Quakers, Peculiar Baptists, Polish Protestant Church, Portsmouth Mission, Presbyterian Baptists, Primitive Congregation, Primitive Free Church, Protestant Trinitarians, Protestant Union, Presbyterian Church in England, Primitive Christians, Protestant Members of the Church of England, Recreative Religionists, Regular Baptists, River Brethren, Reformed Methodist Evangelical Association, Refuge Methodists, Reform Free Church of Wesleyan Methodists, Reformed Presbyterians or Covenanters, Redemptionists or Congre-

gation of the Most Holy Redeemer, Roman Catholic, Ranters, Reformers, Revivalists, Rational Christians, Reformed Church of England, Reformed Episcopal Church, Revival Band, Seventh-Day Baptists, Six-Principle Baptists, Scotch Baptists, Sandemanians, Secession Presbytery, Scotch Presbyterians, Separatists (Protestant), Sabbatarians, Second Advent Brethren, Schwenkfelders, Shakers or the United Society of Believers, Southcottians, Spiritualists or Spiritists, Swedenborgian or New Jerusalem Church, Salem Society, Strict Baptists, Secularists, Shakers, Spiritual Church, Salvation Army, Society of the New Church, Tunkers, Testimony Congregational Church, Trinitarians, Temperance Methodists, United Christian Church, United Secession Church, Union Baptists, Universalists, Unitarian Baptists, United Brethren or Moravians, United Free Methodists, United Presbyterian Church Unitarians, United Christian Church, United Brethren in Christ, United Original Seceders, Unionists, Unitarian Christians, Union Free Church, Unsectarians, Wesleyan Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists New Connection, Welsh Calvinistic Presbyterians, Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, Welsh Free Presbyterians, Wesleyan Reformers, Wesleyan Reform Glory Band, Welsh Calvinists, Welsh Presbyterians, Working Man's Evangelistic Mission, Wesleyans, and others.

There are said to be more than a thousand different religious systems among mankind, but, in the words of Locke, "should any one a little catechise the greater "part of the partisans of most of the sects in the world, "he would not find concerning those matters they are so "zealous for, that they have any opinions of their own." —*Essay on the Human Understanding, p.* 464.

NOTE 3. PAGE 53.

"I perfectly agree with my brother Heath in reprobat-
"ing any distinction between *malum prohibitum* and *ma-*
"*lum in se*, and consider it pregnant with mischief."—
ROOKE, J., in *Aubert* v. *Maze* 2 *Bos. and Pul.* 371, *A.D.* 1801.

"The morality of the position of the learned commen-
"tator [Blackstone] has been well questioned. Its sound-
"ness as a legal principle, though it once had sway in the
"courts, has been since repudiated."—1 *Sharswood's Blac. Com. p.* 58 (*note by Editor*).

NOTE 4. PAGE 56.

"I have never united myself to any Church, because I
"have found difficulty in giving my assent, without mental
"reservation, to the long, complicated statements of Chris-
"tian doctrine which characterize their Articles of Belief
"and Confession of Faith."—ABRAHAM LINCOLN, *Carpenter's Six Months at the White House, p.* 190.

NOTE 5. PAGE 57.

"The measure of what is everywhere called and es-
"teemed virtue and vice, is the approbation or dislike,
"praise or blame, which by a secret or tacit consent, es-
"tablishes itself in the several societies, tribes, and clubs
"of men in the world; whereby several actions come to
"find credit or disgrace among them according to the
"judgment, maxims, or fashions of that place."—LOCKE, *Essay on the Human Understanding, p.* 336, § 10.

NOTE 6. Page 63.

Dr. Bellows, in a letter from Chamouni, Savoy, dated September 15, 1867, comments in this fashion upon the manner of worship at the English Chapel in that place: "Any one who watches the girls and boys, the young "women and young men, saying the creed of the English "Liturgy, with an implicit reverence, into which thought "and choice evidently enter very little, sees plainly that "the theory is not to encourage any thought or choice "about it, but to take the best means for stamping a faith "which has been thought out and agreed upon by compe- "tent persons, upon those who are probably to have no "faith, or only a very foolish and ineffectual one, if they "are not thus furnished. There is an immense deal to be "said in favor of this side of the question."—*New York Liberal Christian, November* 2, 1867.

THE END.

COMMENDATORY CRITICISMS ON THE ESSAY.

"Dwight H. Olmstead has published a lecture, given in this city some years ago on *The Protestant Faith*. It is a candid criticism of Luther's cardinal doctrine of justification by faith. That doctrine, as laid down by Joachim in 1539 was, 'That we obtain the remission of sins, justification, and final and eternal salvation by the mere grace of God, only through faith in the redemption of Christ, and by no worthiness, work, or desert of our own.' Mr. Olmstead contends that seeking salvation is not a religious, but a selfish act. An act performed with reference to a personal benefit is without merit. In the second place, belief is not subject to the will, but is involuntary, and is therefore neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. These points he maintains with brief but conclusive arguments, and shows that Protestantism cannot stand on the ground which Luther defended with so much of zeal and energy." —*The Golden Age, New York, Oct.* 24, 1874.

"This lecture was delivered many years ago before the Young Men's Christian Union of New York. Its style is excellent and its reasoning able. It is a severe criticism of the position of Protestantism, and for the most part, a just one."

"We should do right for its own sake and not from a hope of Heaven or a fear of Hell. Belief is involuntary, and, therefore, no merit or demerit attaches to its posses-

sion. These two points are ably stated and well sustained. The two main positions of Protestants, that we are saved by faith and that hope of reward and fear of punishment are the chief incentives of life, are very clearly shown to be errors in this lecture."—*The Liberal Worker, Sharon, Wis., Dec.* 16, 1874.

"A sharp, readable criticism of orthodoxy and episcopacy by a liberal. It will pay any enquirer to read it carefully."—*Household Messenger, London Ridge, Dec.*, 1874.

"It is written in an attractive, clear and forcible style, and its arguments are most powerfully and logically stated."—*The Malden Mirror, Mass., Oct.* 31, 1874.

"His reasoning is well arranged, terse, and compact in expression."—*Utica Herald*, 1874.

"The author of this little pamphlet has ransacked the treasures of history for information bearing upon the subject which he has so ably discussed, and from the standpoint which he, in common with many others occupies, has given in a small and compact compass a most eloquent and philosophic vindication of the tenets of his belief. Acute, logical, and unimpassioned, he subjects the various religious creeds and systems to a rigid analysis, treating them with remarkable impartiality and with a degree of justice rarely met with in the doctrinal and theological discussions of the day. He starts out with two propositions and maintains his argument with exceeding skill. His first proposition is that 'salvation is not a proper incentive to the performance of duty,' and in this connection very pertinently remarks: 'The theology that looks to the mere salvation of the soul, whether from punishment or from sin itself, can be defended neither on principle nor, paradoxical as it may seem, on the plea of

expediency; certainly not, if he be the happiest who is the most virtuous.'"

"The author then passes to the consideration of the second of his propositions, 'that all belief is involuntary,' and fortifies his premises by most distinguished and unquestionable authorities, and concludes 'that all belief—and, of course, all erroneous belief—is in itself wholly involuntary, and for that reason no one should be censured for his belief or disbelief upon any subject, however sacred or profane.' This point he claims if well taken 'strikes at the very existence of the churches and is fatal to their present form and organization.'"

"We regret that we have not the space to do fuller and more ample justice to his conclusions, conclusions that betray a sound judgment, critical discriminations and careful balancing of evidence. Such critical disquisitions possess great interest and furnish suggestive lessons which few can study without profit."—*The Palisade News, West Hoboken, N. J., Oct.* 10, 1874.

"A candid criticism of Luther's cardinal doctrine of justification by faith, and well worthy the attention of religious people."—*Post, Rochester, N. Y.*

"In about sixty-five small pages Mr. Olmstead sets out his objection to the doctrine of justification by faith as preached by Luther. He sets it out very ably. He is calm and even judicial in his judgment, and as a result his style is clear and forcible."—*Globe, St. Johns, N. B.*

"The most orthodox defender of the belief entertained by nearly all Protestants will find it hard to pick a flaw in his reasoning or find sophistry in his logic. His is a book which it will be well for all exponents of theology, whatever their creed, to master."—*The Day, New London, Conn.*

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"He makes a strong case in regard to the involuntary nature of beliefs."—*Christian Register, Boston.*

"The chapter on the 'Nature of Beliefs and Opinions' should be read by every one, for its conclusions are irrefutable, and indeed the argument throughout is singularly convincing."—*Demorest's Monthly, New York.*

"This is something for calm, cool, earnest readers. We commend this little book to all interested in the lofty themes of which it treats so ably and impartially."—*State Journal, Springfield, Mass.*

"The book is thoroughly interesting and worthy of careful thought."—*Truth-Seeker, New York.*

"A labored and scholarly argument against one of the cardinal doctrines of the Protestant Church. The author's reasoning is very clear and forcible."—*Times, Troy. N. Y.*

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"He reasons with ability."—*Capitol, Washington, D. C.*

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"The reasoning is cogent, save to such as are able to affirm with a distinguished doctor of divinity that 'he believed with the spiritual lobe of his brain, even though the intellectual lobe was entirely skeptical.'"—*Press, Philadelphia.*

"His quotations are numerous and apt. He makes out a strong case against the evangelical churches, and presents very strongly the claim of the gospel of Character. To those who have never studied the subject the essay will be instructive, and to those who are familiar with the Unitarian system of belief, the essay will be of value, partly because of the quotations, and partly because of the condensed and forcible style. We can cordially commend this book to all interested in progressive religious thought."—*Omaha Republican, Nebraska.*

CORRESPONDENCE.

"Your positions are all well taken, your reasoning unanswerable, your treatment candid, your language admirable. I am sorry we have not more such essays for campaign documents."—Letter from Rev. NATHANIEL SEAVER, JR., of Boston, October 13, 1874.

"Mr. D. H. Olmstead's Lecture on the Protestant Faith is strong, true, and timely. It is sound doctrine, well expressed. His view is that to which liberal-minded men in all the sects are rapidly coming, and it is amply proved by the history of creeds and churches."—Memo. from Rev. CHARLES H. BRIDGHAM, of Ann Arbor, Mich., October 19, 1874.

"I have read your argument with much interest, and I agree entirely with your conclusions."—Letter from Rev. DAVID H. MONTGOMERY, Leicester, Mass., October 18, 1874.

"I thoroughly agree with your two propositions. So far as your ground is justified, it is of the last importance that it should be stated; and I apprehend that it is to an alarming extent."—Letter from Rev. Dr. ORVILLE DEWEY, October 14, 1874.

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